



News From:
U.S. Congressman John B. Larson
serving Connecticut's First District
1008 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
221 Main Street, 3rd Floor
Hartford, CT 06106

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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP CALL FOR 100% SCANNING OF SHIPPING CONTAINERS

WASHINGTON, DC ♦ At a press conference this morning, House Democratic Leadership gathered to support Democratic-sponsored legislation to scan all shipping containers bound for the U.S. The legislation, ♦Sail Only if Scanned (S.O.S.) Act, ♦ was introduced by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) and Ranking Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, James Oberstar (D-Minn.).

♦Republicans tried to look tough on security by voting to block the Dubai deal in committee last week, but that does not hide the fact that they have refused to support Democratic proposals to do what is necessary to protect our ports. ♦ said Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader ♦Democrats have a plan to address existing security weaknesses at our ports and establish a comprehensive strategy for homeland security."

♦Democrats have been leading the effort to strengthen America's ports for years in Committee and on the House floor with unwavering commitment, despite continually being defeated by party-line votes, ♦ said Steny Hoyer, Minority Whip. ♦Today we have voiced our support for legislation introduced by Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) and Rep. Jim Oberstar (D-MN) that will lead to 100 percent screening of the cargo that comes into our ports. In a time of unprecedented threats to America's security, we can accept nothing less."

◆The Dubai ports deal finally brought to America◆s attention, the dangerous gaps in our nation◆s port and transportation security systems,◆ said James E. Clyburn, Chairman of the Democratic Caucus. ◆These gaps are a direct consequence of a Republican-led rubber stamp Congress, and now the Republicans are trying to play catch-up.◆

◆"We're in a race between catastrophe and cooperation,◆ said John B. Larson, Democratic Caucus Vice Chair. ◆As long as Republicans fail to cooperate with us, America◆s ports remain at risk."

◆Port security today is in worse condition than aviation security was on 9/11,◆ said Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.), Ranking Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. ◆It is time for Congress to act. We must have effective port security standards and procedures in place before a terrorist uses the marine transportation system as a stealth missile.◆

◆The Republicans have been missing the boat on the issue of port security since 9/11,◆ said Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), Ranking Democrat on House Homeland Security. ◆They have had several opportunities over the past few years to address the vulnerabilities of our nation◆s ports, but instead they◆ve chosen to ignore them. It is disappointing that it has taken the Dubai scandal to force them to finally take this issue seriously.◆

◆No container should be placed on a ship bound for the United States unless it has been screened for nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons,◆ Congressman Nadler said. ◆The Bush Administration has refused to act on this front, and appears content to screen less than 5 percent of the 11 million shipping containers that enter this country every year. That◆s appalling.◆

Congressmen Jerry Nadler and Jim Oberstar have introduced the S.O.S. Act which would require 100 percent of the containers entering our ports, instead of the current 6 percent, to be screened long before they reach our shores. The bill mandates that:

- All containers be scanned using the best-available technology, including scanning for radiation and density, before they are loaded onto a ship destined for the United States;
- Scans be reviewed by American security personnel before the container is loaded; and
- Containers be sealed with a device that indicates tampering, and would notify U.S. officials of a breach before the container enters the Exclusive Economic Zone of the United States.

In addition, Democrats have proposed that every port agreement with a foreign owner be subjected to a 45-day review and that there be an up-or-down vote in both Houses of Congress before the agreement can proceed.

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